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# Fairfield-Suisun Adult School students, teachers protest proposed cuts



Rafael Manzo, an ESL student at the Fairfield-Suisun Adult School, rallies with fellow students to protest proposed cuts to the school Wednesday on Travis Boulevard. (Brad Zweerink/Daily Republic)

FAIRFIELD — Nearly 70 students and teachers lined the sidewalk on Travis Boulevard in front of the Fairfield-Suisun Adult School Wednesday in a noontime protest over proposed cuts that would gut adult education offerings.

“If we start with the parents, it trickles down to the next generation,” said teacher Betty Harrington. “If we don’t speak up, they are going to take it.”

To close a \$6.5 million deficit, the Fairfield-Suisun School District governing board could vote Thursday on two options for proposed budget cuts. Cutting \$862,607 from the adult school is on both lists.

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Such a cut could amount to the elimination of 15 teachers, five teaching assistants and a vice principal. It would also eliminate programs for adults with disabilities, parent education, adult independent study and English as a second language. Those programs serve an estimated 1,188 students, according to Principal Kay Hartley.

With transportation an issue for students, closing the programs would leave students with no alternative, Harrington said.

The majority of the protesters Wednesday were ESL students. Teacher Nancy Cathcart said the messages on protest signs summed up the school's value to the district. Signs read: "I became a citizen." "We help our children learn."

Victor Navarro, 62, held an "I became a citizen" sign. He came to the United States from Mexico in 1974, became a citizen in 1989 and now takes English classes at the Adult School.

"It's important to everybody," said Navarro, a Fairfield resident.

Next to Navarro was Rabi El Chaar, who came from Lebanon in 2011 and is studying to obtain citizenship. El Chaar said his English "is not perfect" but he did say this of the campus: "I love my school."

Sony Almarinez held two signs. One read, "Keep ESL programs" while the other read, "Keep kindergarten." Eliminating kindergarten for one year is an option before the board. Almarinez has a 4-year-old son, Elijah, who is supposed to enter kindergarten at Laurel Creek Elementary School in the fall.

Almarinez, who attends the adult school, said if kindergarten is cut she has no one to watch her son during the day.

"I don't have a backup plan," Almarinez said.

Teacher Shamina Qureshi sees a trend in school districts cutting or closing adult schools. She called it "shortsighted." Qureshi said there is a perception that the adult school primarily serves illegal immigrants. She disagrees.

"I think people need to realize that actually students do give back to the community," Qureshi said. "I just don't want us to be unfairly targeted."

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